Percy
Allen
Gill
GURU-eFX

Vol. 6

X-FORCE

MARVEL

[kra_]
[koa_]

[reign_of_x]

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Vol. 6

X-FORCE

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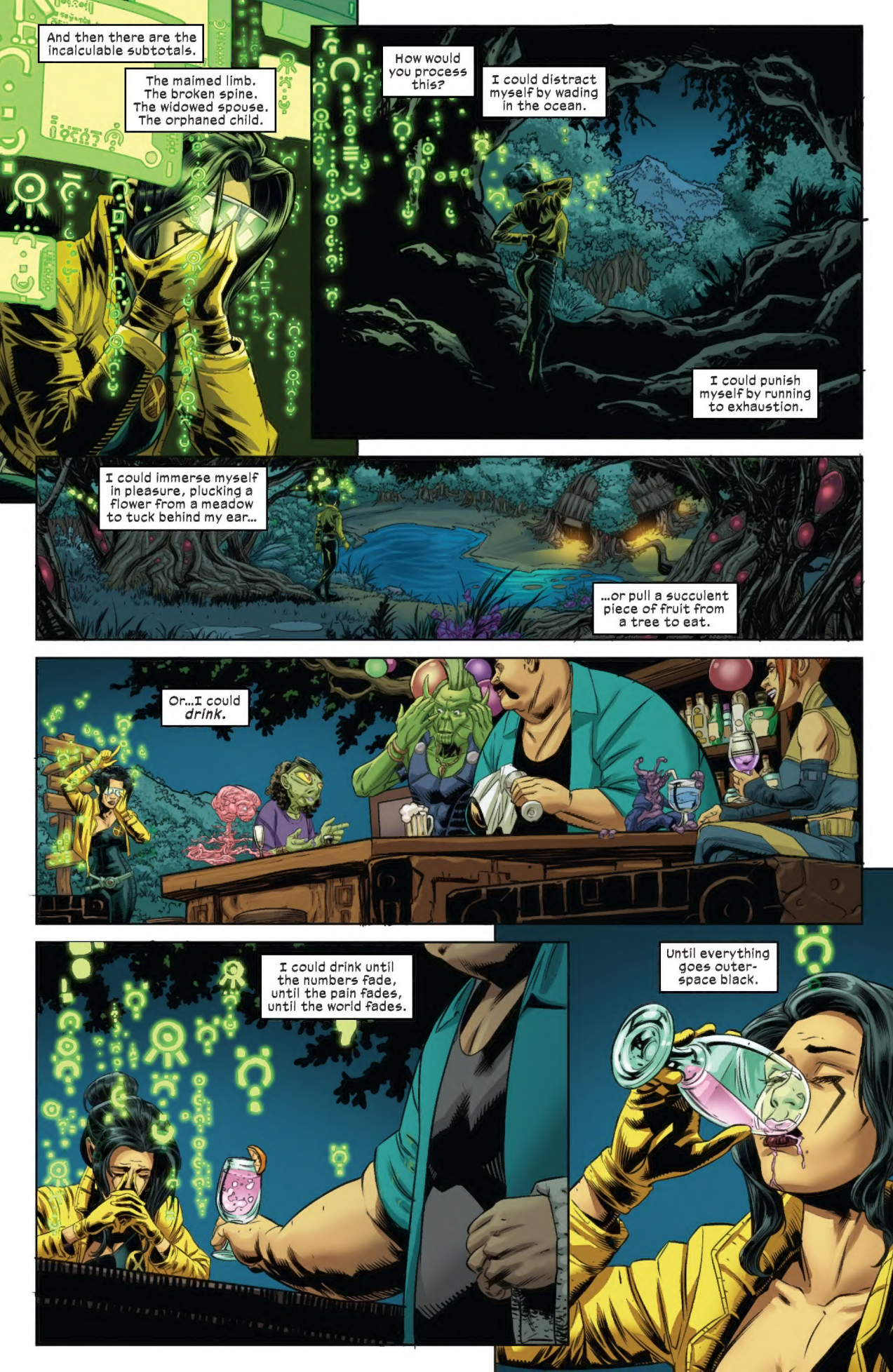
I spend my days plugged in to a wall of screens.
In the most basic of terms, they tell me who we should kill and who will try to kill us.
My eyes are a bloody rain of graphs and calculations and systems and raw logs.
The reports unspool, the predictive algorithms click into place.
A missile will strike. A bomb will go off. A tide of herbicide will threaten our shores.
If an anomaly in the gates is detected, I am alerted. If our defenses erode, I am alerted.
A thousand times a day, I am alerted, alerted, alerted...
...as the command and control desk of an organization that does a lot of good or a lot of bad, depending on your point of view.

Math is usually reassuring because it gives you cold truths.
But the numbers I deal with daily run hot.
Four dead.
Fifteen dead.
Seventy-three dead.


And then there are the incalculable subtotals.
The maimed limb. The broken spine. The widowed spouse. The orphaned child.
How would you process this?
I could distract myself by wading in the ocean.
I could punish myself by running to exhaustion.
I could immerse myself in pleasure, plucking a flower from a meadow to tuck behind my ear...
...or pull a succulent piece of fruit from a tree to eat.
Or...I could *drink.*
I could drink until the numbers fade, until the pain fades, until the world fades.
Until everything goes outer-space black.

[00_Destiny]
[00_____ofX]

X-FORCE

HEAD SPACE

The mutant nation of Krakoa has more enemies than ever. After surviving a devastating attack from the Eternals, Krakoa is rebuilding, but growing distrust abroad is putting ever more pressure on the elite covert task force known as X-Force, even as the mutant planet of Arakko presents even more frontiers in need of their protection. That pressure is driving Sage to find any escape she can from her stress and driving Beast to keep a number of secrets from his team...

[SAGE]

[OMEGA RED]

[DOMINO]

[BEAST]

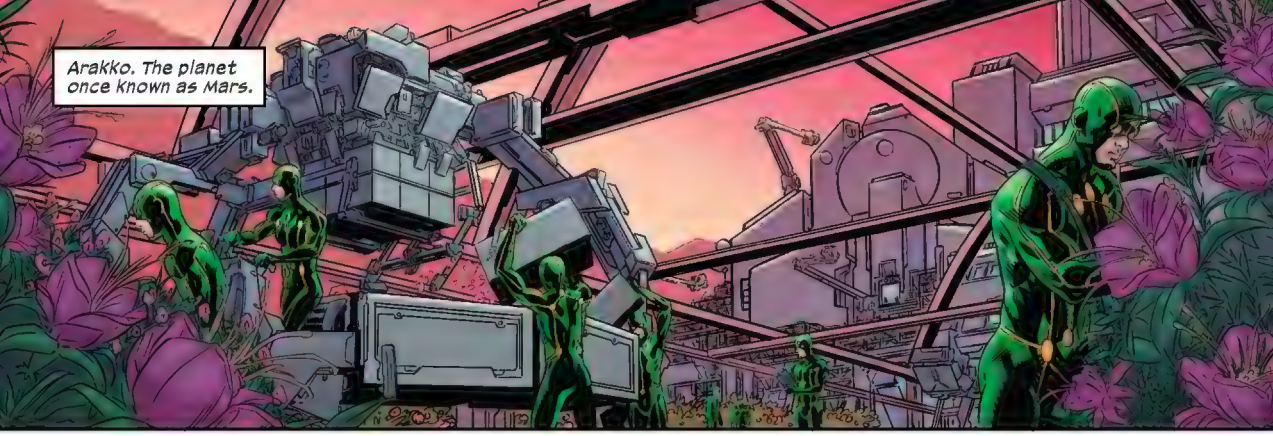
[00_mutant__espionage]
[00_law_order____X___]

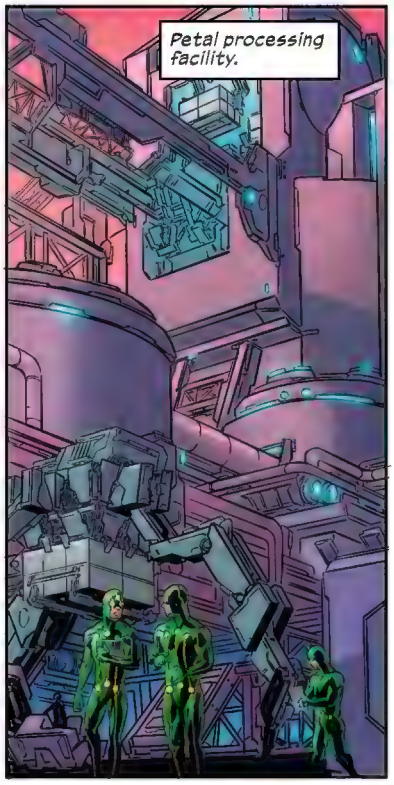
[00_00.....0]
[00_00.....34]

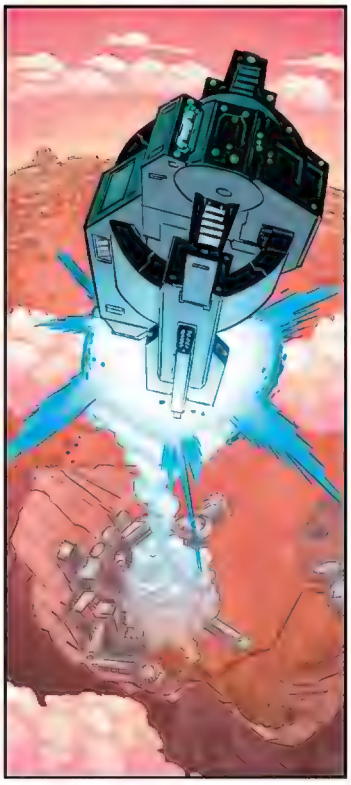
JDC
+
DVW

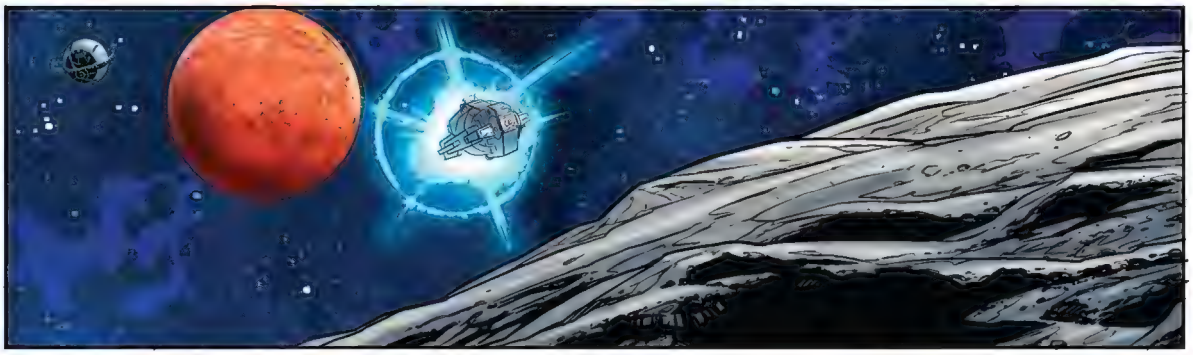
Blackout

34


Arakko. The planet once known as Mars.


Petal processing facility.

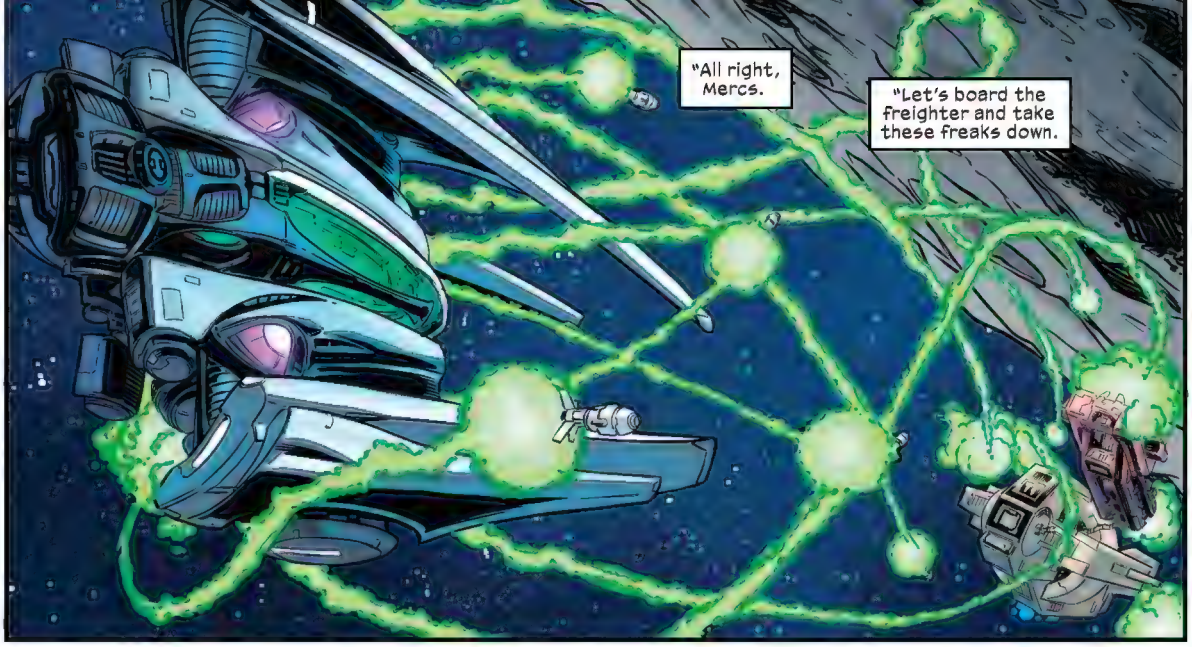




We're not alone.
ZEEP ZEEP
FWAP
KLANG
Ready your arms. We're about to be boarded.
Where are they?
...?
TSSSS
Heads up!

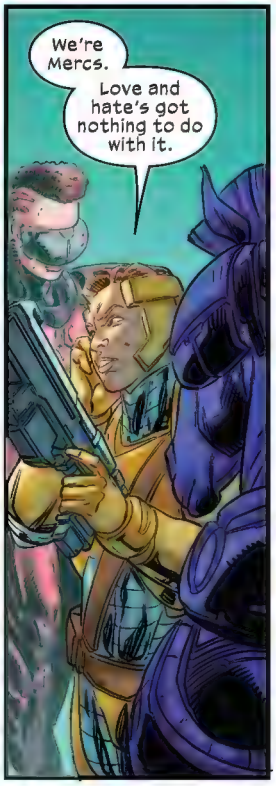
I spent a life pirating the oceans of Arakko.
I didn't realize they were such a puddle compared to the sea of stars.
Move fast.
Let's empty the belly and get the hell out.

The non-treaty nations are desperate for this mutant medicine.
And even the treaty nations have wait lists at every hospital.
We'll flip these petals on the black market for a mountain of coin.
But, Captain Blackmore...
#$@% me.
"Our ambush just got ambushed."
We're locked in, Maverick.
Then make them hurt.


"All right, Mercs.
"Let's board the freighter and take these freaks down.

"Be warned. Sevyr Blackmore and his pirates fight dirtier than a barroom floor.
"They won't give up unless they go down."

Wait, are we working for the Krakoans or the Arakkii?
I thought we hated them?
Basically the same purse.


We're Mercs.
Love and hate's got nothing to do with it.

We're on the side of whoever's paying us, baby.

X-FORCE
FINANCIAL LOG

Dated: ...XX/XX/XXXX
...one year ago...

<Funds Transfer Request>
<<Discretionary Funds>>
100,000,000,000 U.S. dollars

Flagged

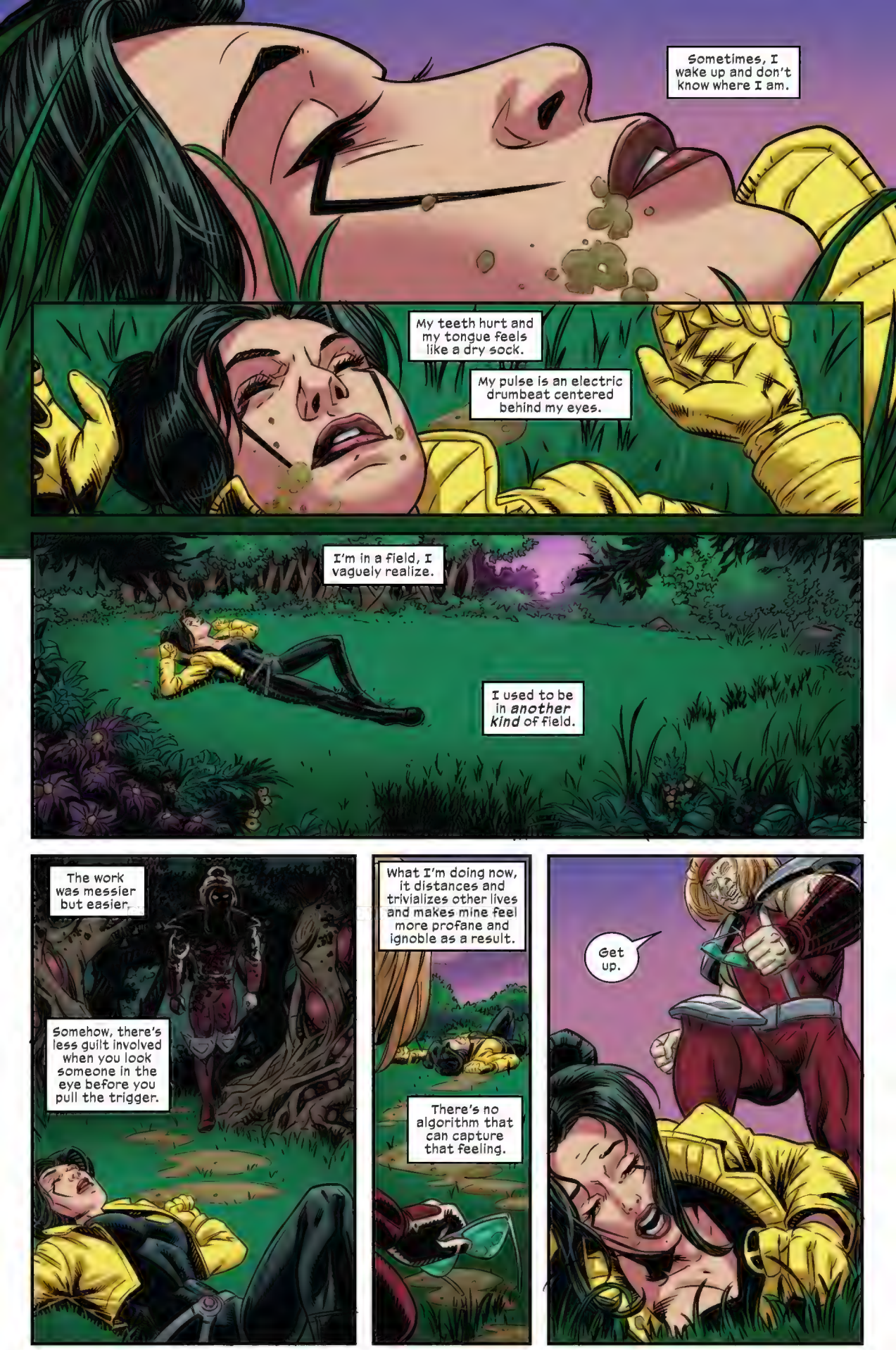
[private message]

Author (Sage): Beast, what is this for?
...
Author (Sage): Awaiting response.
...
Author (Sage): Still awaiting response.
...
Author (Sage): Beast?
...
Author (Sage): What are you doing with a hundred billion dollars?

[reply//private message]

Author (Beast): I tried a fabulous Sekanjabin Sharbat in a Tehran market, and I've brought home the ingredients for Blob. I remember you saying it was your favorite drink, especially partnered with vodka, and I want to make sure you're taken care of at the Green Lagoon, given how hard you've been working. Be sure to head on over for a taste.

Author (Beast): Oh, and I'm pouring some money into Krakoan biotech. Weapons systems mostly. Nothing to concern yourself with. I'll be sure to share more intel if we make any great strides.


Sometimes, I wake up and don't know where I am.
My teeth hurt and my tongue feels like a dry sock.
My pulse is an electric drumbeat centered behind my eyes.
I'm in a field, I vaguely realize.
I used to be in *another kind* of field.
The work was messier but easier.
Somehow, there's less guilt involved when you look someone in the eye before you pull the trigger.
What I'm doing now, it distances and trivializes other lives and makes mine feel more profane and ignoble as a result.
There's no algorithm that can capture that feeling.
Get up.

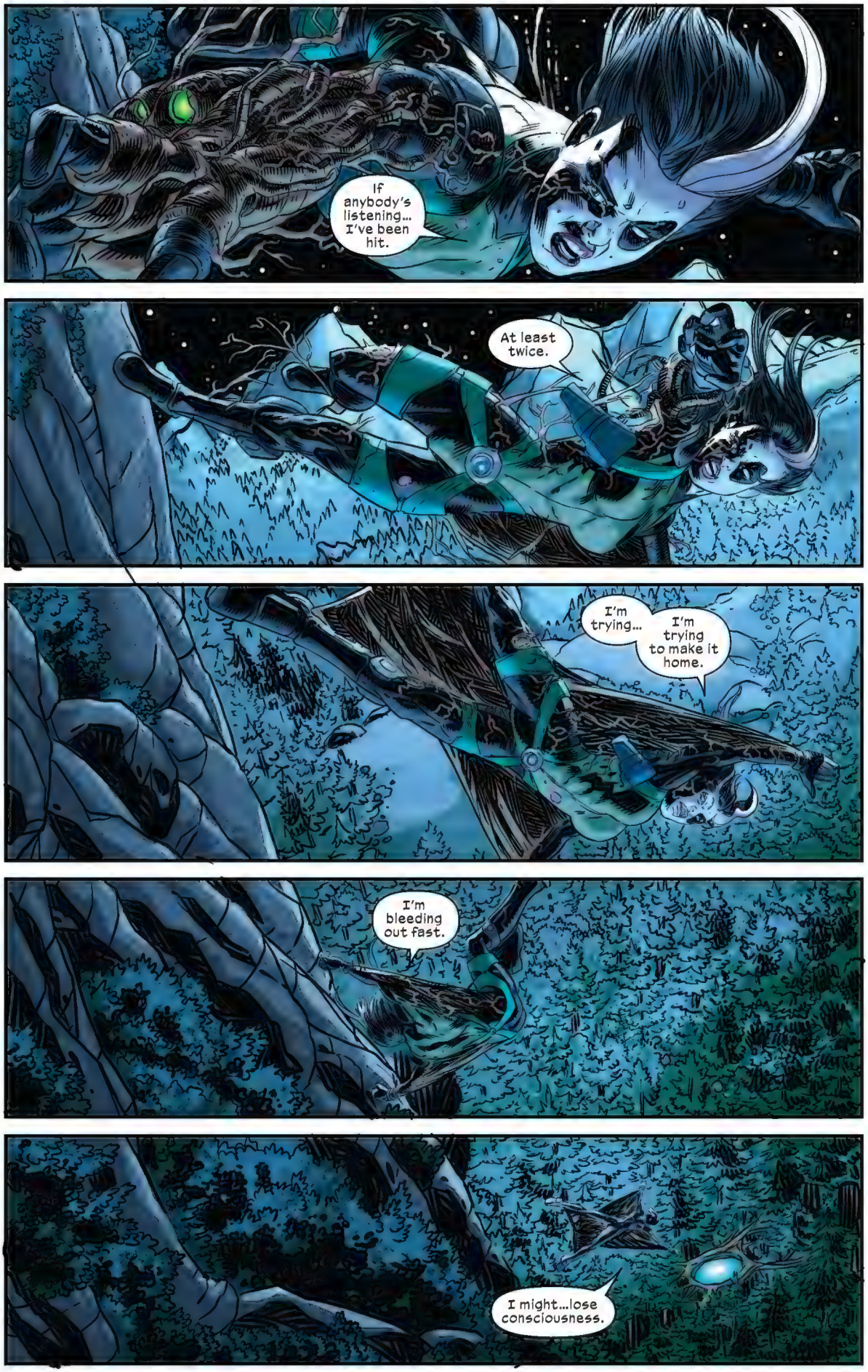
Can't...
Can't see.
My glass-- oh.
Get up. Been looking for you for hours. Waste of my #$%@& time.
I first met Xavier in Afghanistan, where I was doing terrible things.
Now I work for him in Krakoa, where I'm still doing terrible things.
He enlisted me because of what he knew I was capable of.
And now I suppose I'm doing the same with Omega Red.
Violence is the lever with which you move the world, and we've all got our hands on it.

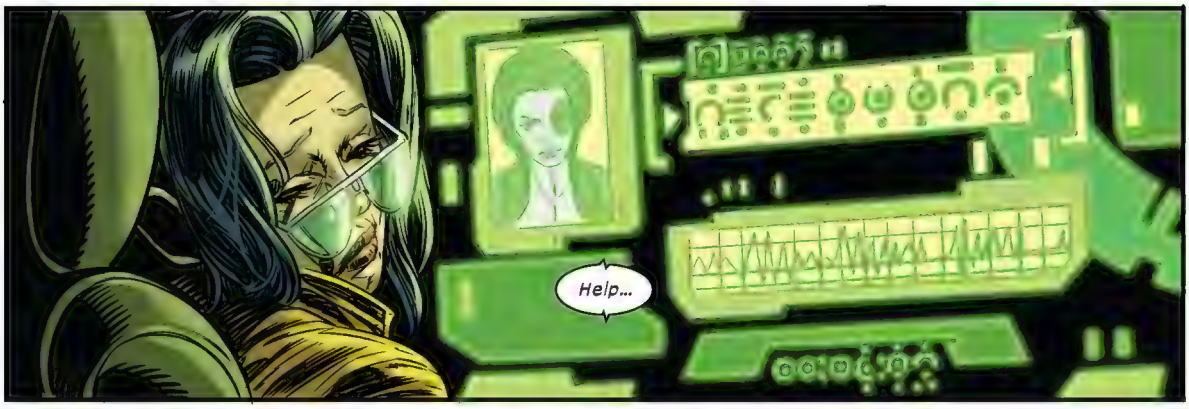
Hold your fire on this one! No bullets!
His blood will eat through bone or metal.

We're going to have to find another way to bring him down.
SHOOK
You're humans.
Puny humans.
KRAK
YEAARRRGGH!
Not all of us, buddy.
FWAP
Why are you and your little *men* policing mutant airspace?
Same reason you attempted to rip off a freighter packed with petals.

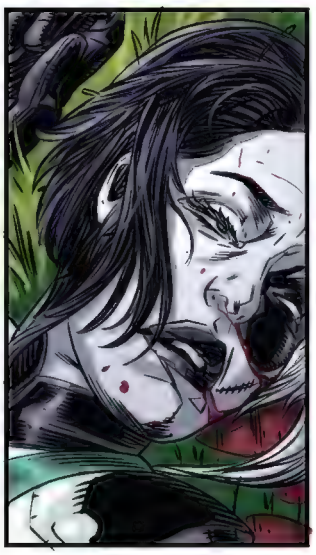
We're all hungry to make a buck.
And the Krakoans sure do have a lot of cash.
Circumstances were different, who knows, maybe we'd be working a job and hoisting a cold one together.
But not today.
No hard feelings, I hope, despite the hard landing.
BOOM

The Dolomites.
Sage? This is Domino.
Sage, do you copy?
I planted the flash drive in the XENO operative's computer.
You should have access to their files...
...but I don't think--
--gaa!--
--you have much time.
Uplink now!


If anybody's listening... I've been hit.
At least twice.
I'm trying...
I'm trying to make it home.
I'm bleeding out fast.
I might...lose consciousness.


Help...

...Sage...
DOOF



Oh...oh no...

Domino?! Please report.
Please.

This is Maverick. Ready the dock.
We're approaching with a hot load of garbage.
Roger that. We'll assemble a welcoming committee.
You stay in line, you stay alive.
Let's go.
As I understand it, the mutants have a justice system.
You stand before a council. You plead your case. Maybe they toss you in a pit. What's this, then?
This...is an alternative.
X-Force decided it wanted to build its own holding pen. Still under construction, so it might be a little drafty.

BEAST'S LOGBOOK: [CLASSIFIED]

Subject: Prison Moon (construction ongoing...)

Initial investment:
//privately underwritten with discretionary funds//

Long-term financial viability:
//mostly irrelevant but costs offset by goods and ships sequestered from clients//

Staff:
//Maverick and his Mercs//
<They can only be trusted not to turn on Krakoa if they're on our payroll.>

Goals:
//private quarters for business and experimentation//

I am observed constantly and require solitude for both deep thinking and research that might fall outside the approval of political and bureaucratic institutions but nonetheless serves the best interests of our nation. The greatest good for the greatest number of mutants must be my guiding light, no matter the cost.

//penal colony beyond purview of Quiet Council//

The fact that we only have a pit -- for our worst mutant offenders -- is, quite frankly, absurd. We must be able to punish and interrogate humans, aliens, et al., for crimes against Krakoa. To serve this need, and stifle any outcry, I am creating this black site. What others don't know cannot rile them into a posturing, diplomatic frenzy.

//experimental site for Krakoan biotech//

All offenders will redeem themselves by serving our cause. I have much to learn about Krakoan biotech -- especially its weaponization -- and the prisoners will assist me in this quest for knowledge.

This way, Blackmore.

I know that voice...

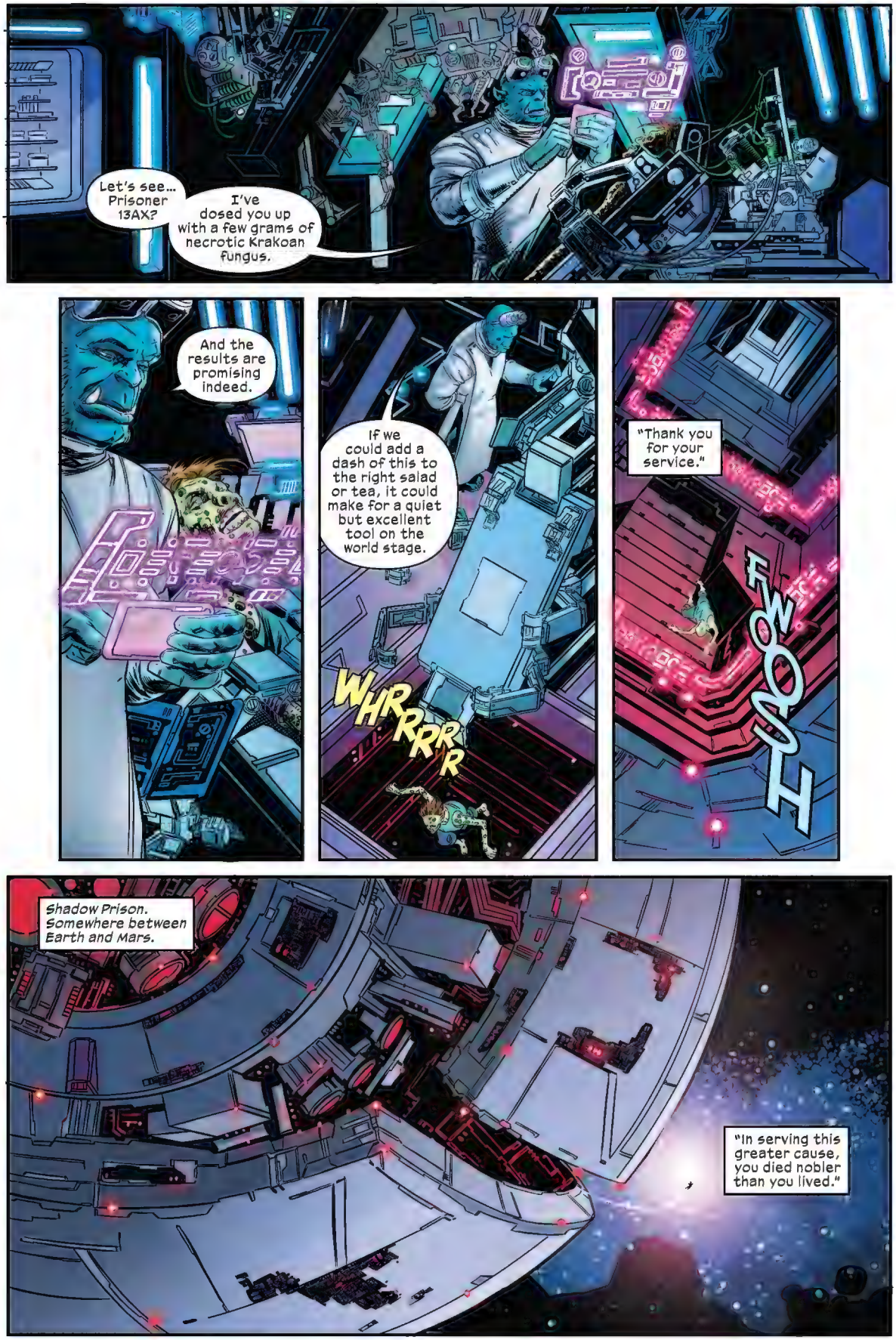
How do I know that voice?
I have a proposal for you, and it's a slippery one, so listen carefully.
It is *you*, isn't it?

Solem.
This secret facility isn't just a prison. It's a lab.
He's performing experiments on the prisoners with Krakoan biotech.
"Poisons. Sporous nannites. Telefloronic control serums.
"Krakoa doesn't know about it.
"Not even X-Force knows about it."

Everything all right in here?
Will be, once I get this piece of Arakkin #%& taken care of.
Why are you helping me?
In a way, I'm helping myself. Because you know very well I'll eventually end up in here.
And...I've never met a lock I didn't want to pick.
ZEEP
But more than anything... after having spent some time in Hell...
...my sympathy will always be aligned with the sinners, not the devils.

Prison Break

35


Let's see... Prisoner 13AX?
I've dosed you up with a few grams of necrotic Krakoan fungus.
And the results are promising indeed.
If we could add a dash of this to the right salad or tea, it could make for a quiet but excellent tool on the world stage.
WHRRRR
"Thank you for your service."
FWOOSH
Shadow Prison. Somewhere between Earth and Mars.
"In serving this greater cause, you died nobler than you lived."

Would anyone like to volunteer to be next?
I want to show mercy, and I know that waiting can be torturous.
WOOP WOOP
What the devil?
Oh, drat.
Open the cells! Kill the Mercs! Join the mutiny!
My dear Sevyr Blackmore... if I may offer a suggestion?
I know you love a good bit of chaos. But I also know you love a good bit of coin.
I believe the warden of this prison could fetch you a juicy *ransom?*

Where is he?
Where is Beast?
Hiding in the bowels of the facility.
Keep raising hell! I'll be back with our prize.
Really?
PING
PING
PING
You're still here?
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
Like you, Maverick, I'm always looking after my own skin.
PING
PING
Huhnn!
But unlike you, I never compromise myself.

You're better than this, Maverick.
SNIK
Or you ought to be.
It's a paycheck, man.
You can take your moralizing and shove it!
This isn't a quarrel in ethics so much as it is a lesson in history.
And if history has taught us anything...
"...it's that you don't side with the fascists."
Maverick? Maverick, do you read me?
This is Beast. I require your immediate assistance.
DOOM DOOM

Healing Gardens. Krakoa.
I'm so #$%& sorry.
You've said that at least twenty times.
I'll keep saying it, and it will never be enough.
I feel like I'm the one who belongs on the table, Domino.
I know you're hurting.
But there's no fungal poultice or herbal tincture that can heal you.
You're the one who's going to have to do the work.
But I'm here for you, just like you're here for me.
Sage...this is Omega Red.
Something's happening.

Let's go. Chop-chop. Your haste is appreciated.
DOOM DOOM
We don't have much time.
DOOM DOOM
I'm about to inject you with a serum crossbred from a Man-Slaughter specimen and a predatory strain of Krakoan flora.
I've been designing this prototype for battlefields.
Your body will become an uncontrollable killing machine.
KRRRRRRRK
That's the bad news.
YARRGHH!
But the good news is...

...you're free.

There's no point of origin for the message sent from Maverick. The source of the broadcast was scrambled.
But maybe I'll have better luck with Beast...
Earlier today, his biosignature departed Krakoa...
...through what appears to be an unregistered gate?
But I can't quite lock in the location.
Let me try.
I'll use the upgrade to my tentacles to plug in to the mycelium network.
Sage, direct my search with an algorithm detecting anomalies and encrypted spaces within 100 meters.
Done.
Follow the highlighted circuits.

Let's see what's behind door #1.
Are you feeling lucky?
Always.
We found his escape hatch.
I wonder how many other secret rooms Beast has...
...and what he has hiding in them.

Maverick? This is Beast. I repeat--do you copy?
BUDDA
BUDDA
Sorry, Beast... Sometimes you got to cut your losses.
BUDDA BUDDA
We're officially quitting this job.
KRSSTRSHHH
BUDDA BUDDA
I'll double your fee.
Not gonna happen.
I'll triple it, then!
BUDDA

Maverick...I know you're always willing to negotiate a price. So you're in the enviable position to name your number. Go on.
We're all addicted to something, right? Booze, sex, money, whatever. I know you think you got me pinned...
ALERT

...but I'm starting to realize...even darkness has rules.

PRISONER INTAKE LOG

Warden: Beast

Acquisition Agents: Maverick and the Mercs

PRISONER 147

Name: Arak Niloo
Age: 43
Origin: Mutant/Arakko (née Mars)
Crime: Attempted assassination of Brand

PRISONER 211

Name: Boing Boing
Age: N/A
Origin: Robot (Roxxon parts -- unknown manufacturer)
Crime: Krakoan gate vandalism/destruction

PRISONER 285

Name: Santino Domingo
Age: 27
Origin: Earth/Spain
Crime: Murder (39 mutants)

PRISONER 301

Name: Lena Ole Mn
Age: 381
Origin: Moord
Crime: [Ship ran out of fuel/stranded near Kuiper Belt; the Badoon was transporting explosive crystals and refused to cooperate when questioned.]

PRISONER 314

Name: Humm Joon
Age: 32
Origin: Mutant/Arakko (née Mars)
Crime: Obstruction of gates

PRISONER 316

Name: Taka Baar Snaka
Age: 19
Origin: Sakaar
Crime: Biohacking Krakoan intelligence

PRISONER 379

Name: Ath Quonni
Age: 44
Origin: Cotati/Hala
Crime: Mysterium counterfeiting

You're sure you're okay to go?
You're sure you're okay to stay?
Before... I'd always been able to keep the drinking separate from the work. I thought it was under control.
I was wrong.
But by hurting myself, I ended up hurting my friend.
That's not going to happen again.
Proud of you.
But it's not easy to break out of the prisons we build for ourselves.
So don't be afraid to ask for help.

Stay safe. I'll be listening.
I hate you.
I hate you as much as I hate me.
Why can't I just delete you like a bad line of code?

I don't know what Beast is up to...
...or what we're walking into.
What's our assignment? Are we gathering intel? Taking down an enemy force? Extracting an asset?
Zeep
Who is the enemy?
Yeah...Yeah, that right there is a question we ask ourselves everyday...
...but find no answer.
There's my escape hatch.
Now where is--?
KR-SH
KLANG

I always thought -shrrn- the worst monsters lived in the deep.
Yoo-hoo! Big bad monster!
I mean the big bad monster who isn't Sevyr Blackmore.
This way to the Krakoan orgy.
Let's send you somewhere that deserves your urgent attention.

Talk to me, X-Force. What are you seeing?
Multiple vics. Injured and dead.
We appear to be in a prison. Evidence points to the Mercs as security.
#!%& Beast.
Have fun. Make a mess.
Who are the prisoners?
At a glance, I've got Badoon, Cotati, Kree. Humans and Arakkii. The occasional robot.
We're touring the apparent aftermath of an uprising.
Who's there?!
Didn't you hear me? I just told you.
Grrk--!

Sage? Is everything okay? You sound like you're breaking up.
Forget her.
We found *him*.
Ah, splendid timing.
What the @#$% is this, Beast?
I've been wanting to surprise you--that's why I've been keeping this place a secret--but it's good that you're here to finally see it.
KRINGH
If you could just let me out, I'll explain everything.
Something tells me you're exactly where you belong.
KUNCH
Excellent. Now we need to clear the vessel of some undesirables.
Omega Red, I think a smart move might be to move toward the ventilation core and release a cloud of death spores.
No.
I'm sorry, but what did you say? Did you say *no*?
Let me remind you that I am your superior.
That's the reason we're here. You think you're everybody's superior.
#$%& your prison. We're getting out.

[sevyr.....[0.X]
[blackmore...[0.X]

"There's the deep dark of the ocean, and there's the deep, deep, deep dark of space. They both hold treasures, but space is as vast and rich as the imagination can conjure. I lost my ship, no thanks to the Wolverine. But I gained a ship, no thanks to Beast. This one-time prison will be my pirate sloop in the times that follow."

-- SEVYR BLACKMORE

[sevyr.....[0.X]
[blackmore...[0.X]

Dom--
-gak-
Is there something wrong with the comm? Because you sound like you're breaking up.
-huff-
Black Tom? Do you copy?
Aye, Sage? What do ye need from Black Tom?
I need a spark of phosphorescent flame.
Now.

Did ye say ye want a will-o'-wisp?
Not want. Need. NOW! Pin it to my geo-location.
Your wish...
FOOMP
...is Black Tom's command.
WOOOSH
REEEEEEE

My work as an analyst tends to keep me away from the danger I'm creating.
Supposedly, that should make things easier on me.
But instead-- to make up for how easy I have it-- I feel like I need to punish myself.
We're all addicted to something, I guess, for all kinds of reasons.
Booze. Money. Sex. Trouble.
KRINSH
Or blood. X-Force is addicted to blood.
Maybe there's a way to rise above those urges.
Maybe.

The Methuselah Complex

36

Are you sure you know what you're doing?
Don't worry.
I watched like thirty seconds of a YouTube glow-up tutorial.
You're going to be red-carpet ready by the time we're done with you.
Omega Red? Show her what you picked out? At the mall?
I know he has a 1980s high ponytail. I know he hasn't changed or even washed his costume in years.
But that *doesn't* mean he *doesn't* have taste.
Hrrrrr.

You have 20 minutes until the rendezvous, Domino. Please, let's not tarry.
I'd like Deadpool and Omega Red on the rooftop across the street for backup in case things go south. And I'd--
What about Sage? What does Sage say?
That's irrelevant.
What does Sage say?
Let me remind you that I am the head of X-Force and--
We're not making a move until we get the green light from Sage.
As Beast said, Deadpool and Omega Red should head to the roof.
We need eyes on the street. Not only to anticipate a potential sting, but to I.D. the source and his vehicle.
Deadpool, the scope on your rifle will stream to my terminal, so your eyes are mine.
This is absurd. They're giving me the silent treatment? Is that it?
I guess you've got a long ways to go before earning back our trust.
Our trust, is it? So you're in on this little game too?
Our trust.

Mumbai. India.
Hey, if they happen to have any pancakes on the menu, be sure to get me a to-go box.
MUMBAI
FIXERS

I'm heading in, Sage.
I'll be listening and feeding you intel as needed.
But for now, a quick reminder: You're Beatrice Domini, an ambassador who represents a secret Euro-Asian alliance of nations.

Several countries are interested in arming themselves against the mutants.
And these people you're meeting claim they've mastered our biotech.
ROYALSHARK

They're calling themselves Panacea.
Clearly it's a shell company, but we don't know who they are--yet--and hopefully, they don't know who we are--yet.

Going on ten minutes and I'm still solo.
Anything to report?
I know there's a billion people in this country, but I think at least a million of them are currently outside the restaurant.
ROYAL SHARK
Maybe the contact smelled trouble. Maybe you got your time zones mixed up.
Or maybe this is all a perplexing dream I'm having after eating too much beef.
Here you are, madam.
But I haven't ordered.
Oh, but this is exactly what you ordered.

A rare heart. In a way... the *rarest* of hearts.
A Wolverine's.
We only accept cash, as you know.
I'll return in a moment to check back in with you.

There's so much on the menu--it's hard to know where to begin.

Lungs that can breathe underwater.
Eyes that can see a mile.

Did you know that lobsters show no signs of aging?
Did you know certain tortoises have lived for centuries?

Biogerontologists believe that, as our brains and technology grow more complex, immortality will be the eventual consequence of our evolution.
The mutants are already there. We need to arm ourselves against them.

I'm bored. And I have to pee. And my neck is getting stiff.
Keep watching the street.
How about you give me a massage with those big, sexy tentacles?
Keep watching.
You're not my dad!
Or wait... are you?
Nobody's coming. This is a dumb waste of stupid time.
We were told to keep watching, so we keep watching.
Also, what's with your name? Omega Red? You're claiming you're, like, what? The ultimate red thing?
Because if there's a poll, and it's down to you and a red panda, I'm sorry to say I'm voting for the panda.
SPLAT
In fact, on the red spectrum, I'd say you rank somewhere between a clown's nose and an inflamed hemorrhoid.
They're here.
If anything, you should be Okay-ish Red or Big Red or Red Pony or--wait, who's here?
XENO.
SPLIP

You're saying this heart...it has a healing factor?
For one month. Then it becomes just a heart.
Our biotech will continue to improve. Your investment can help stimulate our research, ensuring first-round access to the latest developments.
The suitcase included only half the payment. Where is the rest?
You'll get the rest when I feel assured you're providing what I came here for.
Let's talk about how you're doing this and how much you can produce for my allies.
The writing is on the wall: If *Homo sapiens* don't jump-start their own evolution, we will go the way of the Neanderthal.
Imagine an army that can heal even as bullets shred their bodies. Imagine a spy who can visit the dreams of enemies. Imagine...
Is everything... all right?
SPLASH

Wait-- rewind a second-- that was his *eyeball?*
He just plucked out his eyeball and tossed it up here like it was a meat telescope?
Clearly you didn't read the briefing.
Their agents are bioengineered.
Strengthened. Outfitted with accessories.
Hey, if I joined XENO, could you give me, like, sword fingers? Or a cannon for a butt?
SNIK
SKELCH
Let me give you my business card.

Okay.
I guess we're done talking.
Now, the last time I got cornered by you freaks...
...I ended up carved up on a laboratory table.
So forgive me if I cut this meeting short.
CHOOM

REVOLVER

I really hope when we pull off your mask, there's an old man behind it complaining about how he would have gotten away with it if it wasn't for those dang kids.

Okay. I take it back.
Let's put the mask back on.

Ew. Anybody got a mop?

"Clean up on aisle six."

HEALING GARDENS//AUTOPSY REPORT
AUTHOR: DR. CECILIA REYES
<REMARKS>: BEAST

Overview: Two bodily samples were brought back to Krakoa by the X-Force field ops agents stationed in Mumbai. The specimens consisted of a heart and a horribly degraded body.

Notes on Heart:

This XENO-built organ was advertised on the black market as belonging to Wolverine. The cellular match to Logan is incomplete but could be considered adjacent. Experiments reveal his healing factor is on display, with diminishing returns brought on by elapsed time and the seriousness of the injury inflicted on the muscle.

<It should be noted that a careful review of surveillance footage revealed the Man with the Peacock Tattoo collected a biological sample of Wolverine's blood at a Legacy House auction in Madripoor. -- Beast>

Notes on the "Body":

There wasn't a great deal left over to examine. Bones and whatever biological samples could be scooped and mopped off the rooftop. This XENO operative -- in the words of Domino -- "melted" upon their capture. This cellular liquefaction, I suppose, can be considered a whole-body version of the old cyanide tooth. There were traces of mutant DNA in its blood, but only insofar as a jigsaw puzzle could be considered complete if it was missing half of its pieces.

<It should be noted that we are in a biotech arms race with XENO and monstrous examples such as this completely justify my orbital prison experiments. -- Beast>

Flagged Question:

Given that we're seeing our own gene sequences mimicked, has there been any follow-up on the child stolen from the Bowery by XENO operatives?

The XENO agents--on the roof and in the restaurant--ended up dissolving into a kind of biological stew.
It must have been some version of the old cyanide tooth. A death mechanism to keep them from interrogation.
At the end of a typical day, I feel like some version of the same.
My muscles and my mind strained to the limit, ready to collapse.
I just want a long soak in a bath and a solid ten hours of sleep...
...I just want to forget.
But that's not possible.
Because somebody has been here.
Somebody who doesn't want me to find peace.
Somebody who doesn't want me to forget.

The Savage Land.
Piotr.
Domino... you surprised me.
What are you doing?
I'm digging an irrigation canal. To siphon some water off a nearby river. It's been dry lately, and--
What about your girl? I thought whatever her name is--*Kayla*--controlled water?
Oh, yes. Well, she--
But that's not what I was talking about.
I meant what are you doing, sneaking into my biome? And leaving me *this?*

I'm sorry, Neena, but I...
What?
I didn't do this.
I know your style. You painted this. Don't pretend you didn't.
When I was resurrected, my memory of what happened--with XENO in their labs--was gone. So were my scars. You said I asked for that.
If I asked for that, why would you rub my face in it?
I'm sorry. If I painted this, I honestly don't remember.
And I certainly didn't put it in your biome.
You know I always want to believe you.
But something's getting in the way of that.

Liar.
Spy.
THAK
Traitor.

The air was so thick with humidity in the Savage Land that breathing felt like drinking. Sweat dripped from Piotr's every pore as he dug and dug and dug. His shovel blade jammed into the black, loamy soil and scooped it aside, revealing grubs and worms, roots and stone. He was bringing things relegated to shadows into the light. Steadily, he carved out a channel through which water would soon flow and feed his crops.

Irrigation had not been a problem when Kayla was here. She controlled water. She could pull it out of the air, the ground, your body. An aquamancer. He tried not to think of her, because to think of her meant remembering her end and his role in it. Her broken body laid buried not far from where he dug now, only ten or so meters away. When he imagined her body pocketed into the soil, rotting down to bones, the humid air no longer felt like drinking -- it felt like drowning.

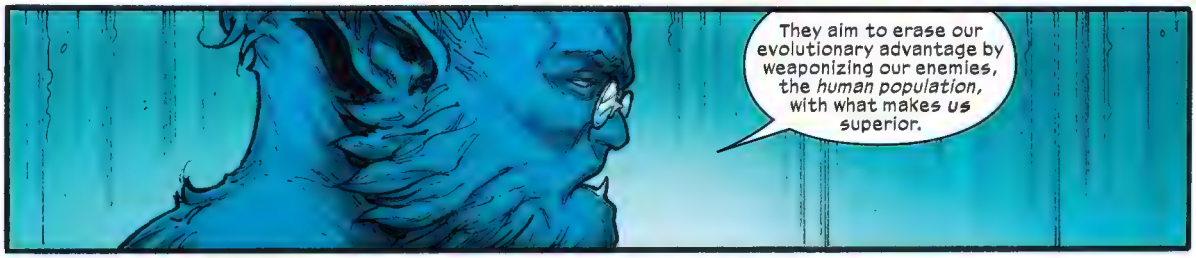
And then came a voice -- a familiar voice -- calling out his name: "Piotr." He had been so twisted up in his work and thoughts he had not heard her approach. Neena. Her face was unkind, her mouth pinched around the words she didn't want to share with him. In her quivering hand, she held a canvas -- one of his own.

~~He told her everything then. He told her he had put the painting in her room as a cry for help. He told her about Kayla and Mikhail and how sorry he was, so very sorry.~~

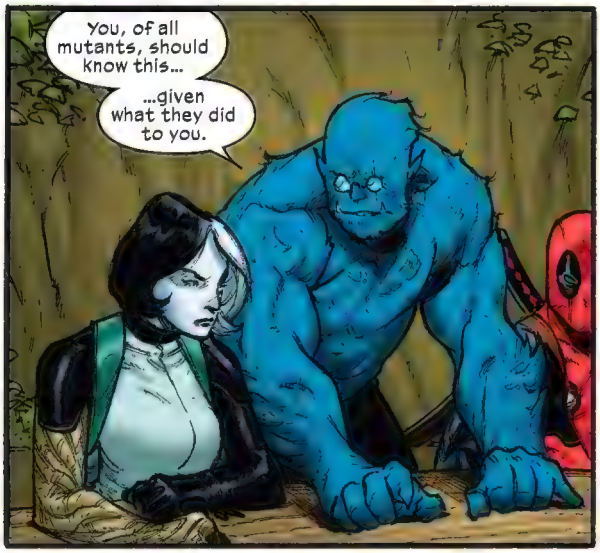
When she asked him about his intentions, sneaking into her biome, leaving such a horrid, tortured piece of art behind, he denied all responsibility.

летописец

XENO... from the very beginning of Krakoa...
...has been trying to end mutantkind.

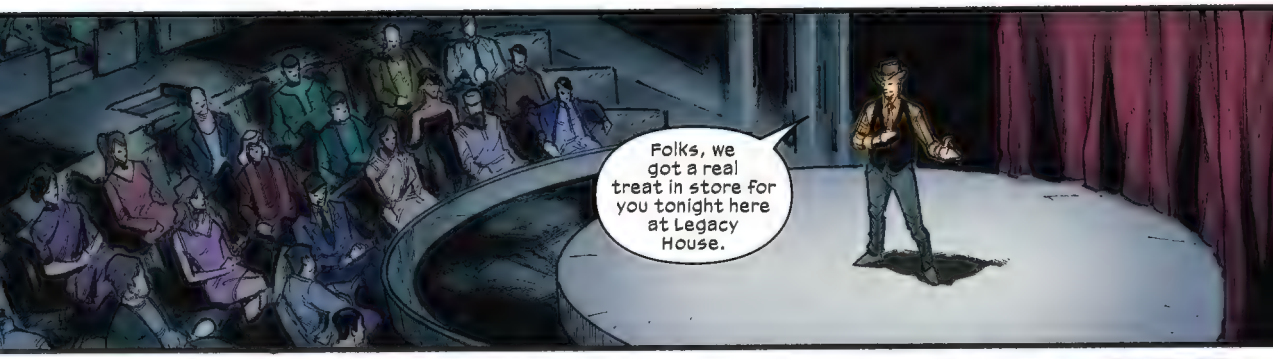

They aim to erase our evolutionary advantage by weaponizing our enemies, the *human population*, with what makes **us** superior.

Hold up. You can't make a blanket statement like that. The humans aren't our enemies.
Your ignorance is appalling.


You, of all mutants, should know this...
...given what they did to you.

They cut you down to bone. They harvested you.
That's enough.

I can't imagine a greater violation of natural order than someone perverting my body to strengthen their own.
I said that's enough!
Um. Dude. Even I can recognize that it's time to shut up.
Moving on, then.
I have a plan.
A plan that will help us locate--and ultimately destroy--their *farm.*
Who's with me?
Sage? What do you think?


Folks, we got a real treat in store for you tonight here at Legacy House.

I'm going to have to ask you to please not drop your jaws on the floor or rush the stage when we bring this next item out.

That's right. You've all heard tell of mutant resurrection.
Well, we managed to acquire what we *believe* is a key to that process, the machine that makes it possible. An egg.

Now, I got no guarantees as to what can be done with this here bit of biotech.
Could be a mere showpiece curiosity or...in the right hands, with the right minds... it could be *revolutionary*.

Let's start the bidding at fifty mill, how about?
6
10
72
37
19
21
Who's got fifty? Fifty, fifty. Give me fifty. Fifty-five!

"You're *sure* the egg can't be used?"
Of course I'm sure, Domino.
The egg is unfertilized. Unpowered. Unconscious. It is a mere Trojan horse. Useful only to us.
"As soon as they begin to experiment on it, the tracking device nested inside it will go live.
"So ready your strike team."
But rest assured that egg might as well be cracked into a pan.

"For them to successfully activate the egg...well... there are an impossible number of steps to even consider...
"...including the help of *a telepath of remarkable genius.*"

Unmasked

37

The Pointe. Krakoa.
Activate the transmitter.
Activating.
As soon as the tracker goes live, we should be able to--
Excuse me? Hi.
You told me to remain on standby? For a mission?
But I'm getting super bored.
Any updates?
Because I'm basically like: Can I kill somebody yet? Can I kill somebody yet? Can I kill somebody yet?
You're interrupting important work.
People say you used to be friendly. And bouncy. Is that true?
Be gone with your foolishness.
And *stand by,* as you were instructed.

Yeah, so I checked in with Mom and Dad, and they're busy doing dumb, boring office stuff, so we can just chill.
You hear that, Omega Cherry Pie?
Yes.
What are you looking at?
The wall.
Am I supposed to notice anything? Like a pattern of vines that reminds you of a kitten or something? Tell me what you're seeing.
A wall.
So this is just a psychopath hobby thing. Got it.
Hey. So. I've been thinking.
Yeah?
We should really have, like, a signature. Something just for the field crew. A catch-phrase or a handshake or... well...what do you think of this?
X-Force!
That's "Wakanda Forever," dude.
Okay, then how about--
--X-Force!
NO.
X-Force!

Or! We could get matching tattoos.
Tramp stamp!
SLIT
SLIT
Not the waterfall! Not the waterfall!
Wait, is this like our own version of the Fastball Special?!
Because that would be precious.
Sure got quiet all of a sudden.
"X-Force."

The signal activates through sporous organics I designed. They bloom from the egg invisibly and can only be detected by our biotech comms.
It's quite ingenious.
We're live. But the transmission is weak. And muffled. The egg is deep underground or in a signal-deadening structure.
Generalized location: Eastern Africa.
Waiting on another ping to triangulate the satellite data and home in on more specific coordinates.
Waiting... Waiting...
What's wrong? Why is this taking so long?
The signal is dead.
No. That's impossible.
We're cut off.
I said that's impossible. You must be doing something wrong.
Everything okay?

If you were wrong about the transmission, I sure as hell hope you're not wrong about their ability to use that egg.
The egg is useless to them, I assure you.
But if it's not, then you've handed XENO our greatest weapon.
Maybe...there's another way to find them.
I used to carry scars. From what XENO did to me.
Physical scars. Emotional scars too.
But when Colossus and I took out that train laboratory, when I laid on the tracks bleeding, I asked him to edit out all the pain.
The Five clipped out any memory of everything that had happened. And now I'm thinking that was a mistake.
Now I'm thinking I need to go back.
Back where?
Back to the past. Back to XENO.
Can we do that, Beast?
The memory files of all mutants are archived, yes.
I've got a hunch--and I always follow my hunches--that I'll find some answers there that will tell us where I need to go next.
Where *we* need to go next, you mean.

Their arrogance is astonishing on so many levels.
I knew they wouldn't allow a resurrection egg--their most closely guarded *secret* and one of the *greatest innovations* in the history of the world--to slip off the island accidentally.
With your help, I hacked it, just as I have hacked their bodies, disabling all safeguards.
Including their ability to *track its location.*
Did I do good, Papa?
Oh, you did wonderfully.
You see, I've been building and building and building all this time.
Sometimes with success...

...and sometimes with *failure.*
I was *almost* there on my own. I had *almost* mastered life.
The egg was the missing link I needed.
And I couldn't have *cracked* it without you, Max.
That big, beautiful brain of yours--it has powers. Telepathic powers that allowed us to take this final step.
Thank you, Papa.
I'm so glad I got you off that wretched island.* I'm so grateful we can do our important work together here. At *our home.*
*As a baby, in X-FORCE #26. --MB
But, Papa...
You're not going to chop me up into little pieces...are you?

XENO LOGBOOK:

Humans have existed for hundreds of thousands of years, but when the fork joined the knife as a standardized eating utensil, our jaws suddenly thinned and we lost our pronounced canines for ripping and tearing. Technology changed biology.

Through my work, I am handing our human bodies the equivalent of forks and knives.

Right now, the mutants occupy the winning evolutionary tract. But just as a painter might set up an easel in a museum, studying a Van Gogh, trying to match his smeary brushstrokes -- or just as a baseball player might watch footage repeatedly of Albert Pujols, so that they might modify their own home-run swing -- I have been using the mutants to influence and jump-start my own creations.

My previous lab experiments were not entirely successful imitations. My Dominos were only so lucky. My Wolverines could not maintain their healing factor.

But two things have changed everything.

The first -- the acquisition of a resurrection egg -- allows me access to the mutant biological factory.

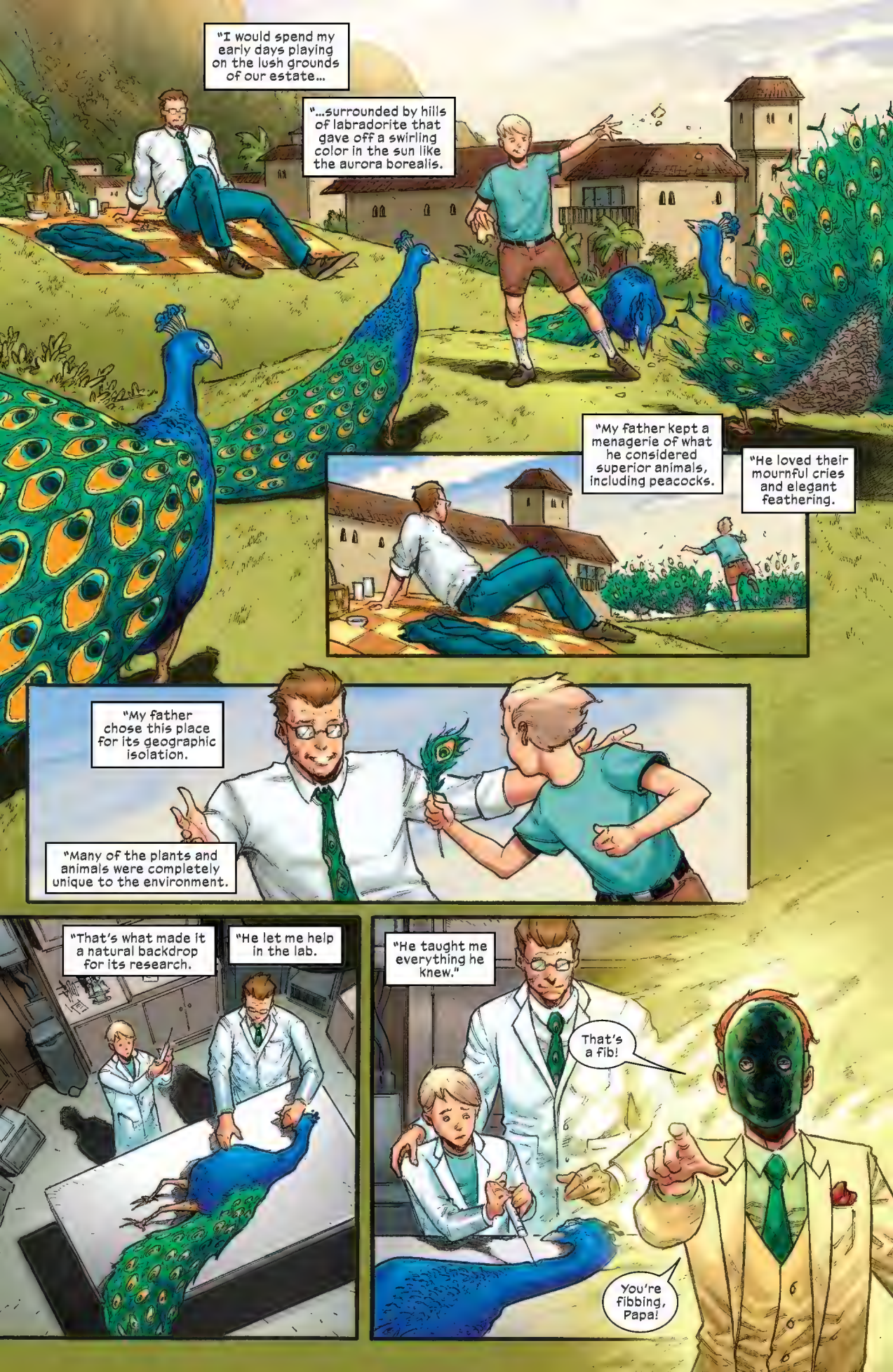
The second -- the kidnapping of Max -- not only permits me to properly fertilize and hatch the egg, but maintain telepathic influence over my creations as well.

A strike team of XENO agents extracted the baby Max from the Bowery, a kind of orphanage on Krakoa.

I injected the boy with a growth serum to hurry up his potential, covering years in mere weeks. But I also gave him...what my father never gave me.

Companionship. Mentorship. Love.

Sometimes I hear things inside your head that are different than the words that come out of your mouth, and I don't know which one is real.
Max...you know you're not supposed to use your powers on me. That's a betrayal of trust.
Then tell me. Tell me so I don't have to go looking.
Tell you what, dear boy?
Tell me about your father, for starters. You're always thinking about him. Always.
And I can't tell if you love him or hate him the same way I can't tell if you love or hate me.
Please, Papa. *Please.*
Sigh
Very well.
"I had an idyllic childhood...
"...on an island not so different from Krakoa.

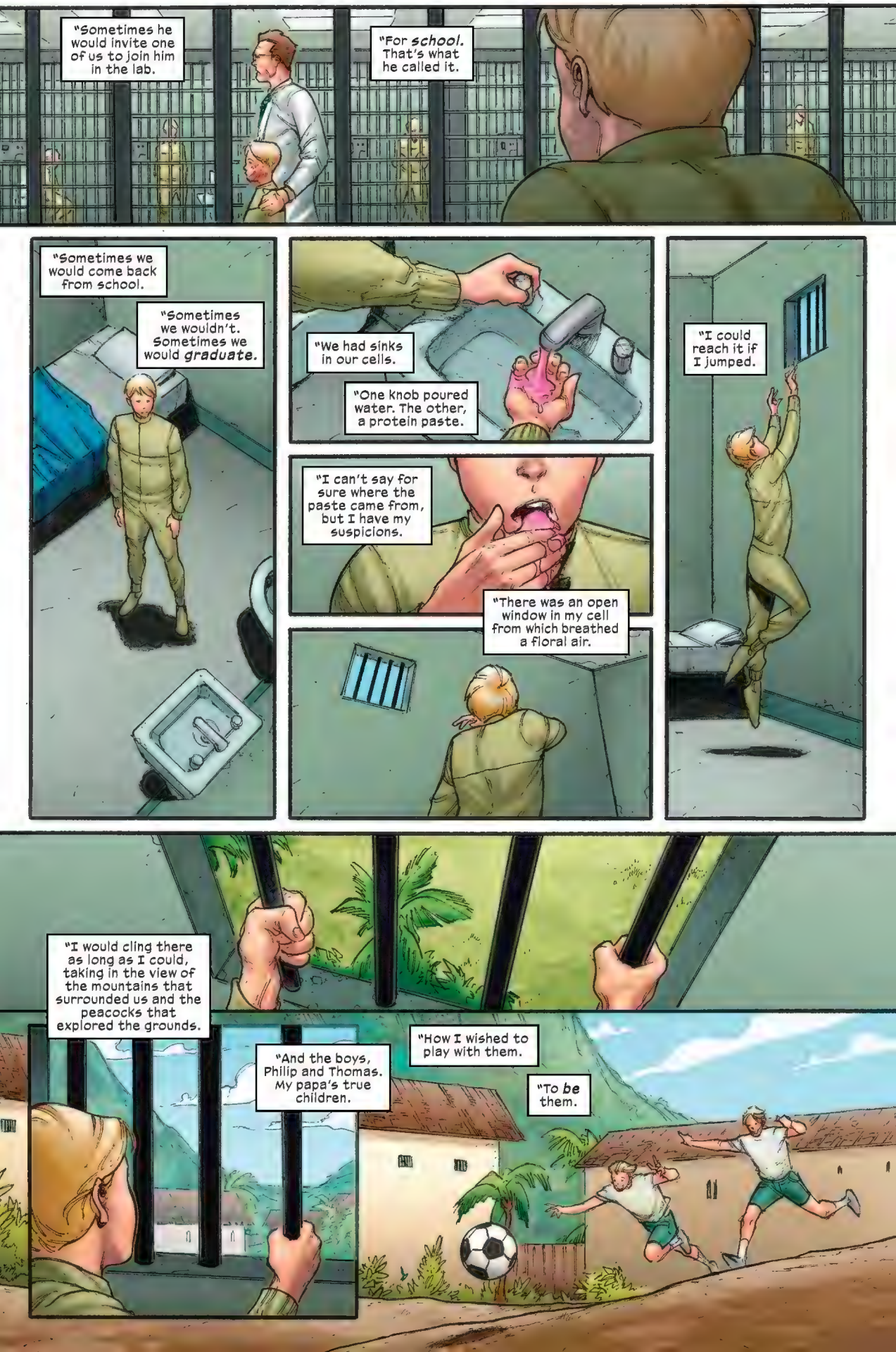

"I would spend my early days playing on the lush grounds of our estate...
"...surrounded by hills of labradorite that gave off a swirling color in the sun like the aurora borealis.
"My father kept a menagerie of what he considered superior animals, including peacocks.
"He loved their mournful cries and elegant feathering.
"My father chose this place for its geographic isolation.
"Many of the plants and animals were completely unique to the environment.
"That's what made it a natural backdrop for its research.
"He let me help in the lab.
"He taught me everything he knew."
That's a fib!
You're fibbing, Papa!

The Hatchery. Krakoa.
Are you sure about this, Domino?
They say you can't remember pain except in the abstract...
...but the reinsertion of this archive could conceivably result in you *feeling* everything all over again.
It's like asking to lick a razor blade.
That's why I don't want Jean or Hope doing the normal psychic transfer.
Direct injection. This pain is my burden alone.
She'll be fine. Won't you, Domino?
It's a noble sacrifice to make for the good of the nation.
This is as much for Krakoa...
THWIP
...as it is for me.

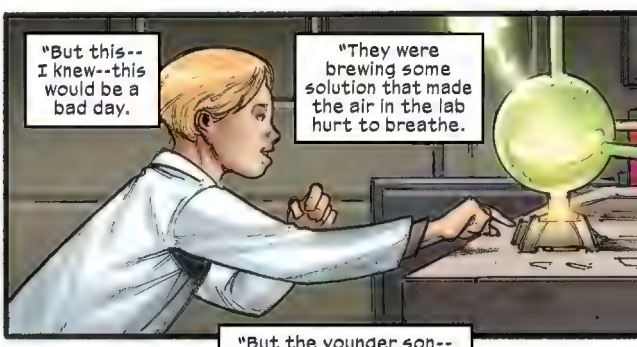
Ngh!
I want to remember everything.
Do you promise me, Peter?

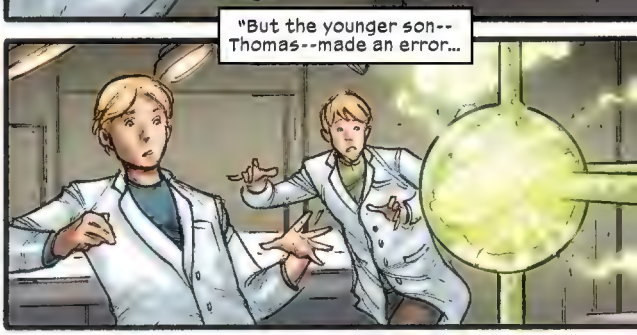
This one's power is luck.
If she's so lucky, what's she doing here?
Luck is like a bulletproof vest. It helps. It doesn't make you invincible.
Every mutant is a mine. I'm simply withdrawing the biological ore to refine into newer forms.
I can help you build an army...
...and repopulate the mutant population of Russia.
Can we really call what you grow here... *mutants?*
Let's not talk semantics. Let's talk business.
My lab in *Genosha* is twice the size of this one, and I can double production there, should you decide on a long-term investment.
Genosha!
He's in Genosha...

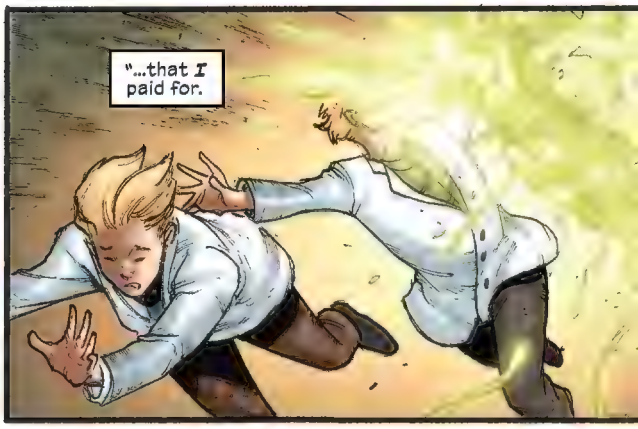
Max...
Tell me the truth!
Let's settle down, Max. We've talked before about your temper.
I'll tell you, all right? I'll tell you what happened.
But I warn you...
"...it's deeply unpleasant.
"I was one of many.
"He called us his children.
"But really we *were* him. Or versions of him.
"*Clones of him,* grown in the lab.


"Sometimes he would invite one of us to join him in the lab.
"For *school*. That's what he called it.
"Sometimes we would come back from school.
"Sometimes we wouldn't. Sometimes we would ***graduate***.
"We had sinks in our cells.
"One knob poured water. The other, a protein paste.
"I can't say for sure where the paste came from, but I have my suspicions.
"There was an open window in my cell from which breathed a floral air.
"I could reach it if I jumped.
"I would cling there as long as I could, taking in the view of the mountains that surrounded us and the peacocks that explored the grounds.
"And the boys, Philip and Thomas. My papa's true children.
"How I wished to play with them.
"To *be* them.

"A good day of testing might involve physical or mental exercises, like solving a maze.

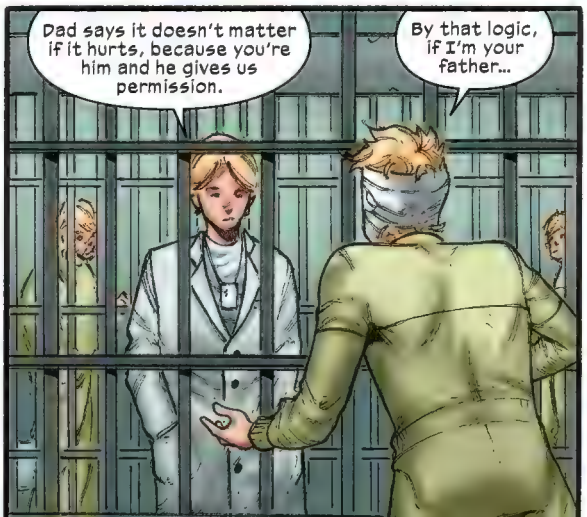

"But this-- I knew--this would be a bad day.
"They were brewing some solution that made the air in the lab hurt to breathe.


"But the younger son-- Thomas--made an error...


"...that I paid for.

"Maybe there was a part of me that thought I might be *thanked* for my help and even welcomed into their family.
"But instead they complained that the experiment had been ruined.

I'm supposed to check on you. To see if you're still alive.
Does it hurt? It must.


Dad says it doesn't matter if it hurts, because you're him and he gives us permission.
By that logic, if I'm your father...

...then I can punish you!
KUNCH
"I thought about killing them all. I thought about burning the place to the ground.
"But I was just a boy...
"...so I ran."
And now you know my story.
And just as layers of sediment in a canyon reveal the eruptions and bones of an earlier time, our skin carries scars.
Because the past is always with us.
And I am the legacy of the *Genegineer*.

XENO LOGBOOK:

My father's religion was biology. He believed in flesh. He worshiped at an altar of blood and bone.

He wanted to achieve a more refined version of *Homo superior* that could be grafted upon *Homo sapiens*.

He referred to the mutants as chaotic aberrations. They had thousands of different iterations, while he was looking for a more singular evolutionary advance.

Why have one person who is a telepath? And another who has super-strength? And another who has a healing factor? And another who can control the weather?

And another who has...tentacle arms? And another who produces...semi-sentient acidic robot slugs from his intestines?

It doesn't make sense. It is biological chaos.

Instead, why not refine the mold and create one perfect specimen? A creature who could do it all?

My father never achieved these goals.

I call him my father, but I know better. My creator, I should say. He built me from his own cells. He soaked me in growth serum. He treated me as other scientists would a rat, as something to be caged and prodded and cut and needled and ultimately disposed of.

I would have liked to have killed him, but that opportunity was stolen from me.

So my revenge is to complete his research and succeed at what he failed at.

I will build that perfect, final specimen. An omega man.

Mozambique Channel.
Sage, this is Domino. The *Bluebird* is through the gate and standing by for further direction.
I'm running through satellite scans and shipping deliveries and electrical grid output for a combined analysis.
Hey, man. About earlier...
Seriously. What's with the wall? Is that like TV for your sicko brain?
And if so, what are you seeing when you look at it?
...
Yeah... okay...I'm with you...
Oh...dear... things are escalating quickly...I think I just threw up a little in my mouth.
So. Wow. *Um.* The Comics Code Authority would ***absolutely*** not approve that.
In fact, I now want to soak my ears in bleach for a year to scrub away all that vile, horrible imagery.
Okay, Domino, I've got my best guess.
That's good enough for me.
Pinging you now with the coordinates.

Genosha is in ruins. Mostly rubble. Fallen trees.*
But...there's a cluster of mountains up ahead that looks...familiar.
Their geology appears consistent with the labradorite masks worn by XENO operatives.
*After the destruction in Empyre: X-Men! --MB
We've got an untouched valley and a compound up among the mountains, but...it doesn't look promising.
Everything's overgrown, abandoned.
He likes to wear a mask. Maybe that's just another mask. Maybe he's hiding.
The electrical grid is dumping 300,000 kilowatt hours into this location a month.
@#$%!
Domino? What's wrong? Please report!
Domino?

Scars are important to recognize. I thank you for helping me remember that, Max.
Because by acknowledging your scars, you're recognizing that right now, you're living in the future's past.
So with some effort, you can leave a profound enough mark that will carry its influence forward for years, decades, centuries, millennia.
You can leave your own scars on the world.
But I don't want scars, Papa.
Because you're going to chop me up into little pieces?
One day, you'll have some of your own, but not today.
Why would you say that?
Because I'm not really your son. Just like you weren't really the Genegineer's son.
I'm just another experiment.
That's not true--
It is! It is true!
Max, no!

"Come back!
"Don't you understand?
"With your abilities, we've been able to take the experiments to the *next level.*
"We're building something so very special together."

Xeno

38

Genosha.
I don't feel lucky.
I can't say I've felt lucky since Krakoa began.
Since then, my life has been a toss of the dice...
...a nonstop gamble of violence and poisonous secrets.
ZEEP
SHOOM
These days, whatever luck comes my way feels like a four-leaf clover growing out of a freshly dug grave.

That's one down!
I call dibs on the next.
Open the ass of the *Bluebird!*
Or do I have to say rear hatch? Because of the rating of this comic? It just doesn't have the same ring.
I'm on a scientific mission to discover what's grosser:
The outside of these creeps...
...or the inside.
Good thing I'm not the only one with a ***big mouth.***

Merr ferr ta herr dee herrr
CHHH
CHHH
Well, friends, in thirty seconds flat...
...I've gained a lifetime of experience as a doula, butcher and spelunker.
A bit of friendly advice.
You might want to step back.
I just sliced my way through every connective tissue in the peritoneum and major artery in its vascular system.
SLOOSH
FLOOSH

I've never said that word aloud--*peritoneum*--but I'm glad I did.
It sounds like something porn-y snuck onto the periodic table.
Ugh. Really?
Have you considered cosplaying the Donner Party at NYCC?
Mmmf Smack
Enough b.s., you two.
We're here to take out XENO's central operation.
Set the charges as we go.
I don't know what's waiting for us...

...but based on my previous experiences with XENO...
...it would be better to take this place down with us in it than survive as its prisoner.
This cell is different from the others.
KLIK
No dust. No cobwebs.
No skeletons.
They're going down! But first... we're going down!
RUMMMM

You belong with me.
SOUTH ELEVATOR 3 ACTIVATED
Can't you understand that, Max?
When it comes to giant leaps forward in society, there was the Industrial Revolution...
...then the Digital Revolution...
...and now the *Genomic Revolution* is upon us. You're an important part of that.
But I need you to stop hiding, so we can continue our good works.
The work the Genegineer began, we are carrying forward.
The molecule is the new microchip.
But it's not just about the important work we're doing.
It's about how we *belong* together.

As orphans, we understand each other.
We form our own kind of family.
Right, Max?
No! Please! Don't cut me up into pieces like the others!
Ughhh...
#$%& mutie.

Sage? We took an elevator shaft down several floors. We still got a signal?
KREECH
You're getting fainter as you descend, but, yes-- I'm here.
What do you need?
I'm in a giving mood.
How'd you like access to the XENO database?
Um. Yes, please.
Arkady?
Working on it.
Uplink established.

Uh-oh. Somebody didn't clean up after themselves in the kitchen.
I wonder what they were--
--cooking?!

Are you seeing this, Beast?
I am indeed.
This is much more than just the data culled from his bio-experiments.
It's the *names... titles...contact information* of XENO operatives.
A global Rolodex.
He hasn't merely been experimenting with mutants.
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM

The names here belong to politicians, business and military leaders...
He's been cloning people.
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BUDDA
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
He's been cloning and replacing people in important places to build support for his cause.
Whatever you do, Arkady...
...whatever happens down there...
....do not stop the uplink.

SAGE'S LOGBOOK: XENO DATABASE ANALYSIS

Scanning...

<bio roster>

Excerpt:

Name: Schwartzman, Jonas
Position: Professor of Political Science, Harvard University
Powers: Telepathy (derived from Quentin Quire)

Name: Swinton, Mildred
Position: Advertising Executive at Stark Unlimited
Powers: Telepathy (derived from Quentin Quire)

Name: Shao, Fenhua
Position: Lance Corporal in People's Liberation Army
Powers: Luck (derived from Domino)

Scanning...

<journal entries>

Excerpt:

Even when I was a child, I was not an I. I was a we. One of many clones of the Genegineer. His goal was to enhance humankind so as not to be outpaced by the evolutionary mistake of the mutants. I still consider myself part of that same plurality. That is XENO. Everyone we build, we build together.

XENO is politics.
XENO is business.
XENO is academia.
XENO is military.
XENO is flesh and thought and power and money.
XENO is everywhere, and XENO is everyone.

Please...
It's okay.
You won't be gone long.
I'll bring back a better version of you.
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
NO...
Please...

I need to help them, Beast.
No!
I need one more minute. Just one more.
I'm noticing a common vulnerability in their genetic makeup.
He threaded some of *Kid Omega* into all of them so as to maintain some level of psychic control and loyalty in his... children.
If we can disrupt that sequence in the XENO mainframe, then...
What? Then what?

Do those death spores taste familiar?
CLAP CLAP
I developed them from *your* genetic makeup.
CLAP CLAP CLAP
You came all this way, only to discover you were already here.
Or at least the ***best parts of you***... united in my ultimate creation--the ***OMNIMUTANT.***
CLAP
CLAP

I'm so glad to see *you* especially, *Domino.*
You were one of my first and best experiments with mutant genetics.
I've been *lucky* ever since.
You keep the #!%& away from me.
Don't worry. I've taken what I need from you.
You're irrelevant to me now.
I'll keep this one though...
Just give me five more minutes *shurk!* and I'll be ready to kick your ass.
I'm curious how his healing factor compares to that of Wolverine's.
Careful, buddy. I'm not even a mutant, and you know how pissed the nerds are going to get if you lump me in with them.
Go on, my child. Tear her apart.
I said go on.
What are you doing?

Max... don't do this.
We're a family, remember?
You called me a #!%& mutie.
You were going to cut me up into little pieces.
SNIKT!
NO!
You don't want to carry around that scar on your heart, kid.
Let me take care of him.

SAGE'S LOGBOOK: POINTE TRANSCRIPT

BEAST: The connection has severed.

SAGE: We received 98% of the data download.

BEAST: That will have to be enough.

SAGE: Enough for what?

BEAST: The XENO plants are united by a psychic signal.

SAGE: Yes.

BEAST: We will pervert its coding to take the plants offline.

SAGE: I don't understand.

BEAST: It will be the equivalent of a global cyanide pill. Look at this roster. It spans the world. In boardrooms and battlefields and congressional chambers in the U.S., Brazil, the UK, South Africa, Japan, India...the XENO plants will, shall we say, self-destruct.

SAGE: Self-destruct? But...

BEAST: There's no but.

SAGE: But there is a but. These are spies, yes. Enemies of the mutants, yes. But are they people?

BEAST: I don't think we can call them people. They're petri-dish experiments hatched in a lab.

SAGE: You do realize the hypocrisy of what you're saying?

BEAST: Oh, come off it. This isn't that hard of a decision.

SAGE: Some of them have existed for years. If they have lived, maybe they should be given the chance to continue to live? Perhaps once the psychic connection is severed, they will--

BEAST: Nah.

Do you know how many nightmares I've had about you?
And do you know how many times I've dreamed about this?
There are so many ways I could hurt you.
I don't even know where to start.
Maybe here.
+Gasp+

Who did that to you?
My father.
Go on. Finish what he started.
I just realized something.
My scars don't hurt so bad anymore.
I'll let you deal with fresher wounds.
Max removed your telepathic link to all your *children*.
And they aren't happy.
AAAAAIIIEEEEE!

Neigh, neigh-- he said hoarsely.
What do you think, kid?
Which kid are you talking to?
Because if you're talking to this kid, I'm thinking about breakfast for dinner. Big old pile of pancakes with a sloppy pat of butter.
He pretends to be dumb, but he's only kind of dumb.
I know.
Hellooooo? Pancakes? Butter?
The man with the peacock tattoo...he hurt me.
But he hurt you real bad.
Yeah. Yeah, he did.
But he's not going to hurt anybody anymore.

For most mutants, Krakoa has felt like a gift, a blessing, the beginning of a life without fear.
But I associate its founding more with pain.
That's when XENO found and tortured me-- and stole from me my cells, my powers, what felt like some sense of my soul.
I've never felt like I could find the same peace that everyone else has.
Maybe that will change now.
Maybe I'm finally going home.

X-Force #34

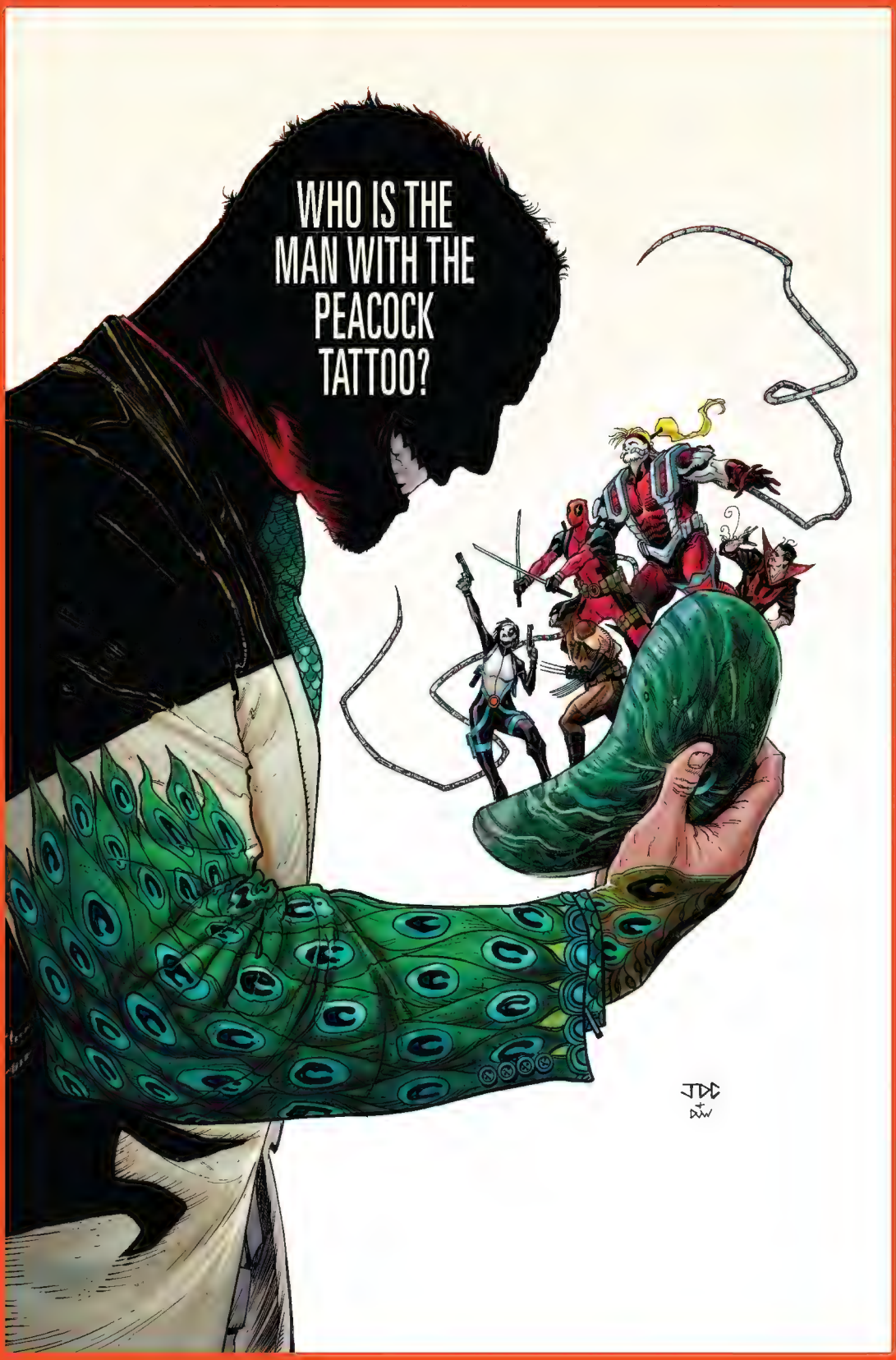
by Joshua Cassara
& Dean White

X-Force #35

by Joshua Cassara
& Dean White

X-Force #36

by Joshua Cassara
& Dean White



X-Force #37

by Joshua Cassara & Dean White

X-Force #38

by Joshua Cassara
& Dean White

X-Force #34 Variant

by Francesco Manna
& Neeraj Menon

X-Force #35 Variant

by Tony Daniel
& Marcelo Maiolo

X-Force #36 Variant

by Mico Suayan
& Romulo Fajardo Jr.

X-Force #36 Stormbreakers Variant
by Nic Klein

X-Force #36 Classic Homage Variant
by Rob Liefeld

X-Force #37 Variant
by Marco Mastrazzo

X-Force #38 Variant
by Todd Nauck & Rachelle Rosenberg

The planet Arakko is a new target for Arakkii pirate Sevyr Blackmore!

But where there's crime, there's inevitably punishment. And that's where X-Force comes in, along with hired hands Maverick and the Mercs! But are even their combined forces up to the task of keeping these deadly warriors from overrunning the solar system? Back on Earth, XENO and its mysterious leader, the Man with the Peacock Tattoo, make their deadly move against X-Force — and all mutants! And Domino, Deadpool and Omega Red are about to fall right into his clutches! At last, learn the secrets of the fiend who's been plaguing X-Force since the series began! But as the terrible truth of XENO's horror-show experiments stands revealed, who — or what — is the Omni-Mutant?!

Collecting:
X-Force (2019)
#34–38

By:
Benjamin Percy, Chris Allen, Robert Gill, GURU-eFX and Carlos Lopez.

MARVEL

PARENTAL ADVISORY

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